

HOW THE CZECHO-SLOVAKS OFFSET GREAT ODDS IN RUSSIA

First Hand Story of Heavy Fighting With Bolsheviki and How Anarchists Were Outwitted by Smaller Forces

Lieut. Karel Zmrhal, writer of the following account of Czech-Slovak fighting in Russia, first served as a corporal. He presided over the convention that decided to fight the Bolsheviki and led a detachment in the succeeding battles. His story shows what vast difficulties were overcome by the newly organized nation.

By KAREL ZMRHAL.

IN the middle of May a small Czech-Slovak army in Russia was scattered along 5,000 miles of railway. Some of the trains in which it started its long journey in March were already at Vladivostok, while some were still standing in Southern Russia unable to reach the Siberian lines. At every station the Czech-Slovak trains were held up on one pretext or another, while the Moscow authorities attempted to break up the army by insisting that one-half of it should be diverted from the Vladivostok journey and go north to Archangel. In Siberian cities the Soviets were ruled by German and Magyar executive officers who made it plain that they would not permit the army of the Czech-Slovaks to reach the western front.

It was evident to every member of this small army, to the common soldiers as well as to the officers, that they were a handful of unarmed men among millions controlled by enemy influences. The fate of the army and of every individual was at stake, and since the Czech-Slovak army was a volunteer army, democratic in its composition and without its commander in chief, who was then in America, it was decided to call a convention of delegates from all the units of the army, who would decide what course should be adopted.

Trotsky Ordered Great Killing.

The convention met on May 20 at Cheljabinsk on the boundary of European and Asiatic Russia, and 125 delegates were present from all the scattered units of the army except from the Vladivostok group. The delegates coming from Vladivostok were imprisoned by the Bolsheviki at Krasnoyarsk. Even before the convention met secret orders were issued by Trotsky on May 17 for complete disarmament of all Czech-Slovak troops, internment in prison camps of common soldiers and killing of all officers. The convention did not know this when it decided on May 22 to proceed to Vladivostok regardless of the desire of the Bolsheviki commissaries, and to cut their way through should attempt be made to stop and disarm them.

On May 27 came the news of the treacherous attack by the Bolsheviki upon the Czech-Slovak trains at Mariinsk, Zlatoust and Irkutsk. The convention adjourned and it was the turn of the military leaders. When the break came with the Bolsheviki the position of the Czech-Slovak troops would have discouraged the most sanguine commander. West of Penza, the Czech-Slovak trains reached the Siberian Railroad on their march from the Ukraine, there were still nine trains, but these detachments were well armed. Between Penza and Syzran, where the railroad crossed the Volga, there were six trains; then there was a jump to the Ural, and Cheljabinsk itself there stood seven trains and a hospital train; further east at Kurgan was one train of commissaries and one train of supplies; at Petropavlovsk one train of supplies, and at Omsk was the staff train of the army corps. Scattered on the wide plains between Omsk and Irkutsk were seventeen trains and fifteen trains had already discharged their men at Vladivostok. All trains stationed east of Penza were disarmed and in some of them there was not even a single rifle.

In addition to the lack of weapons and to the scattering of the small army over thousands of miles of track there were no planes and there were no experienced leaders. It seemed almost impossible to establish contact between the different sections of the different units. The telegraph could not be used because the wires were under control of the Bolsheviki.

Staff Was at Omsk.

The staff of the Czech-Slovak army was in Omsk, but even if it had been in Omsk, it is doubtful whether Gen. Sakharov, at that time chief of staff, would have dared to carry out the decisions of the convention. The commanding General of the First Division, also a Russian, showed much hesitation that he was dissatisfied. Given before the open break came it was impossible to get the staff train out of Omsk to Cheljabinsk, which became the new headquarters of the Czech-Slovak army.

In this staff train was a small printing outfit and the few Czech communists in service of the Bolsheviki were anxious to get hold of this equipment so as to be able to counter their propaganda among the Russian Army. The man with most military experience was Gen. Dietrich, but he was over 4,000 miles away in Vladivostok. The few we were able to find were commanders, a few staff and a few plan almost within twenty-four hours.

The new Czech-Slovak army consisted mostly of young men, so there were practically no staff officers available. Those of our men who had been officers in the Austrian army were all reserve Lieutenants and Captains. Even in Russia, up to the time of our departure from the Ukraine, the high commands were given to Russian officers.

Formed a New Staff.

A new staff was created, consisting of the commanding officers of the First, Fourth, Seventh and Second Divisions. Its members were Lieut. Col. Vojtechovsky, Lieut. Cenek, Capt.



Cheljabinsk Convention of the Czech-Slovak Army at which decision was taken to march to Vladivostok. The arrows point to Lieut. Karel Zmrhal, chairman, and Katherine Breshkovskaya, grandmother of the revolution.

Gajda and Lieut. Syrový. Within three days these men worked out a plan for taking possession of the Siberian railroad and securing it from flank attacks. Couriers were sent to deliver orders to train commanders and the staff broke up so that its members might assume individual commands. The operations were divided into five groups: that of Penza, commanded by Cenek; of Cheljabinsk, commanded by Vojtechovsky; of Omsk, commanded by Syrový; the group of the east, commanded by Gajda, and that of Vladivostok, commanded by Dietrich.

The couriers succeeded in reaching all the trains to the west of Cheljabinsk, but in the other direction they only got as far as Krasnoyarsk, about half way from Cheljabinsk to Lake Baikal. There they were imprisoned. So it happened that the strong group in eastern Siberia took no part in the principal campaign.

Orders were issued to take possession of the railroad at the same moment, but not until the Soviet of national commissaries gave its answer to our last appeal that it should abandon its demand for our complete disarmament and for our dispersal. The Soviet answered by treacherously attacking us at Mariansk, Zlatoust and Irkutsk on May 26 and 27. The Czech-Slovak army then, without firing a shot, occupied the important Junction of Cheljabinsk, together with the city of Cheljabinsk, numbering 50,000 people. Here 2,000 Red Guards were disarmed. On May 29 Penza was occupied after a severe battle. We captured there 700 machine guns, many cannons, rifles and cartridges innumerable and military supplies of all sorts. It took fifteen trains to carry all away.

Faced a Double Attack.

This victory did not solve all the difficulties of the Penza group. Before it was the River Volga, along which a strong Red Army was placed, and attacks were to be expected from both sides and the rear as well. Our men numbered 8,000 and had to rely on themselves, while the Reds could expect reinforcement from all sides. The Red Army was composed mostly of prisoners of war and it was 13,000 strong, all well armed. To meet them the Czech-Slovaks sent a part of the Fourth Regiment under command of Lieut. Gayer. In all these battles the numerical superiority of the Bolsheviki was so overwhelming that our men

risk of their reputations, stand such men as Rear Admiral Robert E. Peary, the first man to reach the pole; Alan R. Hawley, president of the Aero Club of America; Rear Admiral Bradley A. Fiske, John Hays Hammond, Jr., Rear Admiral William N. Little, Henry A. Wise Wood, Henry Woodhouse, Prof. Charles L. Poor, Col. E. Lester Jones, Charles Jerome Edwards, Major Cushman A. Rice and Augustus Post.

These men are the members of a special committee of the Aero Club of America who have announced their belief in the success of such a plan and their willingness to arrange for the financing of the expedition. The cost will be borne by the Aero Club and possibly by geographical and other

scientific organizations interested in revealing the hitherto unsolved mysteries of the north.

Capt. Bartlett, a Newfoundland man, although a citizen of the United States since 1911 and at present an officer of the navy, has a becoming amount of respect for birthplace industry, so he has selected to bear him and his party to Etah, Greenland, one of those stout wooden Newfoundland craft which are almost unchangeable in the most menacing ice packs. The name of the vessel is still withheld, as are the names of all members of the party except Capt. Bartlett himself. The vessel, however, is 125 feet long, 30 feet of beam and draws 15 feet of water. She is equipped with a 250 horse power engine, but will rely mainly on her sails. She will be rigged as a three-

masted schooner. It is probable she will leave New York about May 31. The vessel will carry in her hold folded up one large airplane, possibly of the sort known as seaplanes, and several smaller planes. In addition she will be fitted with all the latest and best scientific instruments, and will become on her arrival at Etah a floating laboratory. At Etah, which will be reached in from ten to thirty days after setting sail from New York, depending on ice conditions, the smaller airplanes will wing their way north 550 miles across Ellesmere Land to Cape Columbia, where a cache of gasoline and supplies will be made. Then as the weather moderates the ship itself will be used to dredge the Polar sea for the submarine flora and fauna of the Arctic Basin, while skilled meteorologists study the air currents with the aid of small balloons and while airplanes travel hundreds of miles a day where in former years dog sledges

Cape Columbia, the point from which Peary made his dash to the Pole in 1909, will be the base for the exploration of the vast territory to the westward. It is known that coal, mica and many minerals are abundant in some of the explored portions of the North, so it is within the bounds of probability that this region, if it is above water, may be rich in valuable minerals.

The great mineral wealth of Alaska is well known. As the unexplored portion of the Arctic is north of Alaska and Canada, those behind the expedition believe it logical to assume that



General J. Gajda, commanding northern front.

General Rudolf Cenek in charge on the Volga.

General Jan Syrový, commander of all Czech-Slovak troops.

had to resort to desperate measures, above all to surprise.

Gayer sent part of his small command to go around the Red Army and attack them from the rear, and when he thought that this detachment had had time to get to its place he led the balance of his men to attack in front in the face of furious machine gun fire. His plan was successful and the Red Army ran away; but Lieut. Gayer had both legs shot away and died. His victory opened the way across the Volga, and the railroad bridge, defended by thirty machine guns, was captured in thirty minutes by an attack of our bombers.

During the first days the Czech-Slovak Army had several "fronts." Sometimes the groups fighting on the different fronts had no communication with each other, and the only thing to make their action harmonious was the fact that the goal was to be Vladivostok. The group that reached Vladivostok was entirely cut off from the main body and this body was itself broken up into separate commands which were obliged to garrison innu-

merable towns and railroad centres. It counted not more than 35,000 men. Some of these commands, especially that of Omsk and further east, suffered constantly for lack of weapons and ammunition.

These troubles were gradually removed. First we occupied Kurgan, then Petropavlovsk was captured. Here the Reds were quite strong, for in a single factory building they had 600 men well supplied with machine guns; but the whole city was captured by the third storming company of 150 men. This small body immediately struck north to cut the Tiumen-Omsk railroad so as to make impossible the sending of reinforcements from Ekaterinburg.

Thus Omsk was surrounded on three sides, and as the Soviet had no desire to try their luck against the Czech-Slovaks in battle, the Bolsheviki leaders collected all valuables and fled toward Tiumen on steamboats. Omsk was occupied by 200 Czech-Slovak recruits. The Red Guard in this city was composed almost entirely of former Magyar prisoners who bragged

that they would settle the Czech-Magyar controversy right there in Omsk, but when the Czech-Slovaks were near the Magyars got rid of their Red Guard uniforms and sought refuge in prison camps. By the fall of Omsk three groups were united, and Siberia was free from the Ural to Krasnoyarsk.

Warmly Greeted by People.

The people of Siberia looked upon Czech-Slovak victories as wonderful events which brought them freedom. Conditions of life changed immediately. Before the armed occupation of the Czech-Slovak cities and industrial centres lacked food, as the Reds were requisitioning everything and the peasants hid supplies. Now plenty of food appeared over night in the city markets and the prices came down 60 to 80 per cent.

When the possession of Cheljabinsk Junction had been secured by the occupation of Troick on the south and Kysym on the northwest, military operations were started in the Ural to secure connection with the Penza

group, of which the Cheljabinsk headquarters had unsatisfactory news. Zlatoust was promptly occupied and we took possession of the industrial centres in the eastern Ural, while the Penza group was pushing east from the Volga and occupied Ufa.

In the meantime the eastern group after the fall of Omsk proceeded further east, took over Tomsk, where the population itself got rid of the Soviet, and marched toward Nizhny-Ussinsk and Irkutsk. On July 2 all our groups celebrated the anniversary of the battle of Zborov, the first great battle in which the Czech-Slovak soldiers in Russia greatly distinguished themselves.

In these days also came the news that France had formally recognized the Czech-Slovak army as an allied army and the Czech-Slovak National Council as the revolutionary Government of Bohemia. The following day at the little Ural station of Minar the boys from Cheljabinsk met the boys from Penza. That put more than three thousand miles of railroad in the hands of Czech-Slovaks.

The eastern group undertook to safeguard the railroad along the Semipalatinsk branch and it protected the track also from surprise attacks along the Yenisei River. Detachments were thrown as far as the gold mines of Lena. Here the boys captured a part of the Russian gold reserve to the amount of 350,000,000 rubles (\$175,000,000). They turned it over to the newly formed provisional Government of Siberia.

After securing their rear this group marched on beyond Nizhny-Ussinsk on Irkutsk, which was held by a strong Bolsheviki army. The city was captured with comparative ease, but then the great problem was to get control of Lake Baikal with the mountains surrounding it and to get into its hands the railroads which ran through forty tunnels around the northern end of the lake.

For several days the Czech-Slovaks fought with the Bolsheviki navy on Lake Baikal, improving their own navy, and by surprise attacks won a victory. The majority of the tunnels on the Siberian railroad were mined by a hired German engineer, and everything was ready to blow them up. That was a calamity that our boys wanted to avoid, and so for five days a column of them with provisions on their backs climbed the Baikal Mountains, until they caught the Bolsheviki in the rear and disarmed them before they could touch off the mines. By that time the Allies had decided to intervene in Russia and the Czech-Slovaks were designated as their advance guard.

The western groups were operating in the mountainous northwest. They captured Ekaterinburg, the strongest point in the Ural, and by a surprise attack they got Kizna, where they seized the main Russian gold reserve, amounting to 650,000,000 rubles. This was also turned over to the newly constituted All-Russian Government. The Vladivostok group did not begin their operations until June 29. In one day, with the assistance of allied warships, they took possession of Vladivostok with its population of more than 200,000. Several Soviet warships sailed out of the harbor, but they returned soon to surrender to the Allies' ships, because, as they expressed it, it would have been a shame to surrender to a land army.

Cleaning Up Siberia.

After the occupation of Vladivostok this group undertook a campaign to the northwest to capture Nikolai, the western Siberian headquarters of the Reds; after occupying this city and the railroad as far as the Manchurian border, this Czech-Slovak group turned east toward the Amur railroad. The Bolsheviki forces here were numerous, since their detachments, driven from both the east and

Millions in Gold Recovered and Thousands of Miles of Railroad Captured—Law and Order in Occupied Territories

west, joined on the Amur. Also in far eastern Siberia the Bolsheviki had only recently grasped power and had not committed such excesses as to turn the people against them. For all these reasons our men suffered great loss here; in two months the fighting casualties were proportionately twice as large as the loss of the western groups in three months fighting. By the time our men reached Khabarovsk the allied detachments joined them, and when a little later traffic was established along the Chinese eastern railroad to western Siberia all the Czech-Slovak groups were sent to fight on the western or the Ural fronts.

After connection had been reestablished with Vladivostok and the entire railroad through Siberia was in our hands, a regular battle front was established along the Volga and in the northern slopes of the Ural. The Red Army planned to recapture at any cost the cities of Kazan and Ekaterinburg. They captured Kazan because the small Czech-Slovak garrison could not hold it and evacuated it voluntarily. This was necessary to shorten the front and prepare for winter. But all the efforts of the Bolsheviki army to capture Ekaterinburg were defeated with great loss. To-day the entire Czech-Slovak army is concentrated in the Ural Mountains.

Truth About the Movement.

I have heard the charge made in this country over and over again that the Czech-Slovaks joined the counter-revolution or that they were in the service of allied capitalists. The fact is that the three Czech-Slovak armies, in Russia, France and Italy, have been a part of the allied group armed forces and subject to the supreme military command of the allies. But even before we received instructions to remain in Russia—that was on June 28—our convention decided we could not abandon Russia until there were guarantees that the new coalition government, enjoying the confidence of 90 per cent. of the people, would be able to maintain order. So far there is not in existence a Russian army strong enough to oppose the well-armed and German-trained Bolsheviki army. For one thing, all military equipment had been abandoned to the Germans on the old front, so that the new Russian army is not as yet able to hold its own without allied assistance.

As to the reproach sometimes made that the Czech-Slovak army joined the counter-revolution, I will say myself, though I am a socialist, that the charge is true. For this counter-revolution against the Bolsheviki is a democratic-socialist revolution. It was prepared by all the Russian Socialists, and it is not a revolution in the arbitrary fashion in which the faction of Lenin and Trotsky employed the power they had usurped.

Czech-Slovaks by their interference on May 27 merely hastened this Russian revolution. By this act the Russian people, poor and immensely poor, much less blood was shed in Siberia than would have been the case otherwise. Everybody knows that the communist Soviet did not represent the nation; to-day it does not represent even the working classes. They maintain control in power by violence more objectionable and barbarous even than the old czarist system. Such a government cannot be of service to the people, and as for Socialism, it is a profanation of it. Is the Czech-Slovak army maintained by the Allies? No. Down to the end of 1917 we were considered a part of the Russian army, and as the supreme Russian command, and was maintained by Russia. When the Bolsheviki went to Brest-Litovsk to make peace with the Germans, the Czech-Slovak army became an independent army and was maintained with its own means, namely, by revolutionary loan of the Czech-Slovak people. When this money was exhausted the army secured an international loan from the Siberian Government under conditions which protected its independent standing.

Why Allies Were Asked to Help.

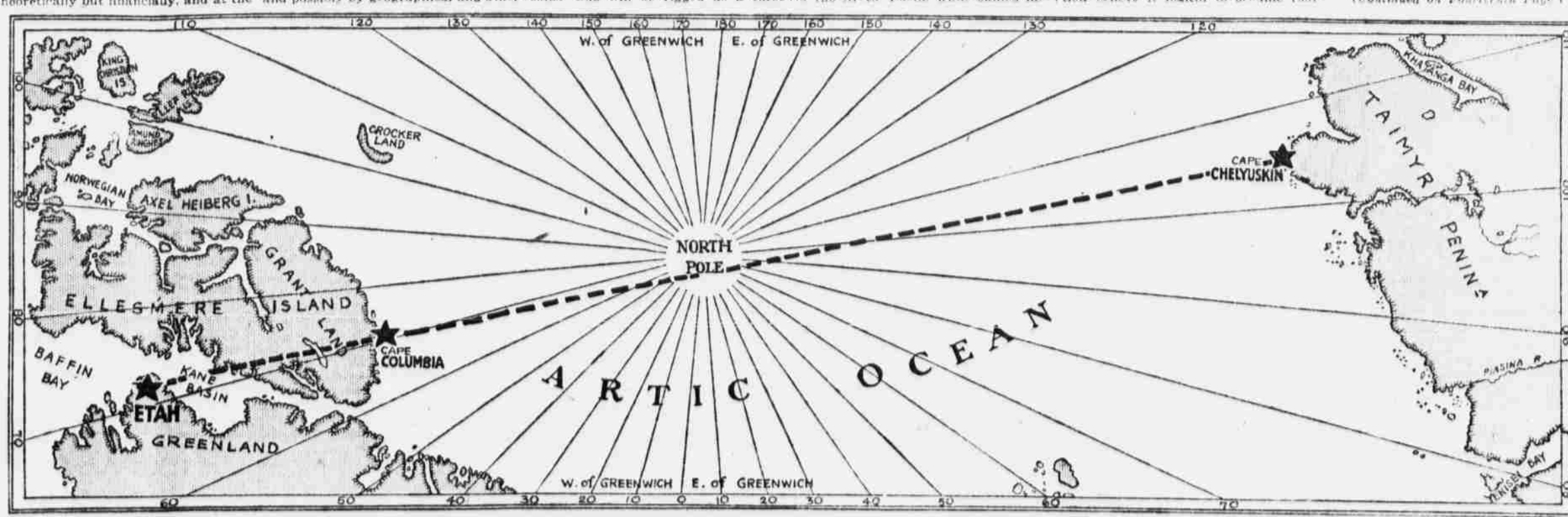
Why did the Czech-Slovak army call upon the Allies for assistance, thus bringing about international intervention? It was one of the allied armies from the beginning, and it was entitled to call on its allies for help. When it was faced by overwhelming odds and tried out by constant fighting it was fully justified in asking the Allies to come to its assistance.

The Soviet Government by attacking the Czech-Slovak trains on May 26 and 27 attacked the Allies. If there had been any sort of orderly government in Russia and if Trotsky-Lenin had kept the promises made to the Czech-Slovaks, this small army would have left Russia long ago and there would have been no occasion for international intervention.

The armed interference of Czech-Slovaks in Siberia justified itself by its fruits. It conferred immeasurable benefits upon the liberated territory. Production in commercial and industrial establishments which broke down completely under Bolsheviki rule has been restored. This was done with the assistance of Czech-Slovak engineers and foremen who were acquainted with conditions governing Russian industry and assisted in carrying through a reorganization.

Up to the time when the Czech-Slovaks took a hand in Siberia all this was in the hands of army prisoners of war, who worked for the interest of German capitalists and prepared the way for German exploitation of Russia.

From the educational point of view intervention has also been beneficial. Among other things, two new universities have been opened at Khabarovsk and Irkutsk. The Russian people have full confidence in Czech-Slovaks, and the Czech-Slovaks will not disappoint their Russian brothers, but will carry on their fight until it is concluded successfully.



Route of Captain Bartlett's proposed airplane trip over the North Pole.